

MOLD FAQs

1. What is mold and where does it live?

Molds are microscopic fungi that are part of the natural environment. They can grow almost anywhere (inside and out), but live especially in the soil outside. Molds use tiny spores to reproduce. The spores are invisible to the naked eye and float through the indoor and outdoor air. Mold may begin to grow indoors when mold spores land on a wet surface. Mold grows well on paper and wood products and can attack many materials found in buildings such as fiberboard, drywall, carpet backing, ceiling tiles, insulation, fabric, upholstery paper, dust, wood, paints, and exposed soils in crawlspaces. Molds can gradually destroy the things that they grown on and once established can be hard to eliminate. Mold come in many colors and can often be detected by a musty odor and discoloration of affected surfaces. Mold spores must have moisture to grow. There is no practical way to get rid of all indoor mold spores, but you can prevent and control mold growth indoors by controlling moisture.

2. How can mold affect my health?

Fortunately, for most individuals, mold does not cause serious health concerns. However, molds do have the potential to cause health problems, particularly in people who are sensitive to it. Molds produce substances that can cause allergic reactions, irritants, and sometimes potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). The same amount of mold may cause health effects in one person but not in another. Some types of people who may be sensitive to mold include: the very young and very old; people with respiratory conditions, such as asthma; and, people with compromised immune systems. Allergic responses to mold may include sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and skin rash (dermatitis). In both mold-allergic and non-allergic people, mold exposure can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs. Molds can also trigger asthma attacks in people with asthma who are allergic to mold. All molds should be treated the same with regard to their potential health effects and cleanup.

Please consult with your private physician regarding you and your family's health concerns related to mold. Research on the health effects of mold is ongoing. All potential health effects of mold exposure are not described here.

3. How can I prevent mold from growing?

Mold Prevention Tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Keep the humidity level in your home between 40% and 60%. Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months and in damp spaces, like basements.
- Be sure your home has enough ventilation. Use exhaust fans which vent outside your home for kitchens and bathrooms. Make sure your clothes dryer vents outside your home.
- Fix any leaks in your home's roof, walls, or plumbing so mold does not have moisture to grow.
- Clean up and dry out your home thoroughly and quickly (within 24 – 48 hours) after flooding.
- Add mold inhibitors to paints before painting.
- Clean bathrooms with mold-killing products.
- Remove or replace carpets and upholstery that have been soaked and cannot be dried promptly. Consider alternatives to carpet in rooms or areas such as bathrooms or basements that may have a lot of moisture.
- To learn more about preventing mold in your home, see the Environmental Protection Agency's publication *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home*
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html>.

4. Should I have my home or business tested for mold?

We do not normally recommend testing or sampling for mold and we do not routinely visit homes or job sites to investigate or test for mold. In most cases, if you can visibly see mold growth, it is not necessary to determine the type or level of mold. However, if you suspect that you have a hidden mold problem, you may want to consider hiring an experienced professional.

You do not need to know the type of mold that is growing. All types of mold should be treated the same with regard to cleanup and potential health effects. Additionally, there are no established health risk levels and no local, state or federal limits as to how much is too much mold. The effect of mold can vary greatly depending on the individual. If mold is growing in your home or business you should remove it AND fix the moisture problem.

If you determine that you want to have someone investigate or test your home or business for mold, you can find a mold professional in the Yellow Pages under "Environmental Consultants," "Mold and Mildew Services," or "Water Damage Restoration."

5. How do I get rid of mold?

There is no practical way to get rid of all indoor mold spores, but you can prevent and control mold growth indoors by controlling moisture. If mold is growing in your home or business, you should clean up the mold AND fix the moisture problem.

In general, mold growth on hard surfaces can be removed with commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.* Mold on absorbent or porous materials, such as carpet, may have to be discarded if they cannot be thoroughly dried and cleaned. Take precautions to limit your exposure to mold and mold spores when cleaning moldy areas. It is recommended that you wear gloves, goggles, and an N-95 respirator (available at many hardware stores for about \$12 to \$25). Depending on the size of the area to be cleaned and extent of the damage, you may need to hire a professional to do the cleanup. In most cases, for moldy areas that are less than about 10 square feet, you can handle the job yourself. If needed, you can find a professional in the yellow pages under “Environmental Consultants,” “Mold and Mildew Services,” or “Water Damage Restoration.”

Please consult the following guides from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for more detailed information on how to cleanup mold, appropriate precautions, and when to hire a professional.

- *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home*, available at <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>
- *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*, available at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html

***When cleaning with bleach, never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners, as this will produce dangerous, toxic fumes. Open windows and doors to provide fresh air. Wear non-porous gloves and protective eye wear. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.**

6. What is *Stachybotrys chartarum* or “Black Mold”?

Stachybotrys chartarum is a greenish-black mold, often referred to as “Black Mold;” however, there are many other types of mold that can be greenish-black in color. Given the right conditions, some strains of *Stachybotrys chartarum*, as well as certain other types of mold, can produce toxic substances called mycotoxins. These types of molds are sometimes called “Toxic Mold.” There are very few reports that “toxic molds” found in homes can cause unique or rare health conditions. A causal link between the presence of a “toxic mold” and these conditions has not yet been proven. All molds should be treated the same with regard to potential health risks and removal. No matter what type of mold is present, or whether or not it can produce mycotoxins, it should be removed promptly, with the appropriate precautions taken to limit exposure (see “How do I get rid of mold?”)

7. How can I report a plumbing problem that is not being repaired by my landlord?

If you have a plumbing problem that is not being repaired by your landlord, you can file a complaint with the Shelby County Health Department, Sanitation Department at (901) 323-8473.

8. How can I report a roof leak that is not being repaired by my landlord?

If you have a roof leak or other structural or environmental housing code violation that is not being addressed by your landlord, you can file a complaint with the Shelby County Department of Housing/Code Enforcement at (901) 576-7380 or <http://www.memphistn.gov/HCDWeb/content/reportcomplaint.aspx>

9. What can I do if my landlord is not responding to mold or maintenance complaints?

Sometimes maintenance issues can become landlord and tenant rights issues. If it appears that the landlord is not going to be helpful, you may want to find out what your rights are.

Applicable TN code includes: TN Code 66-28-304.

The Memphis Fair Housing Center can provide legal assistance to eligible renters with landlord/tenant issues. They can be contacted at: (901) 432-4663.

If you reside in federal public housing, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) handles complaints regarding landlords in federal housing and many other issues. To make a complaint against a landlord to the Multifamily Housing Complaint Line, call toll-free at 1-800-685-8470 / TTY 1-800-432-2209. For more information: <http://www.hud.gov/complaints/badlandlord.cfm>

If you are dissatisfied with service you have received from an apartment complex company, you may want to file a Consumer Complaint. A complaint can be filed at:

<http://tn.gov/consumer/complaint.shtml>

10. What can I do if there is mold in my workplace?

You should report any concerns about mold in your workplace to your management so that the issues can be addressed.

Workplace health and safety issues are handled by the Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Association (TOSHA). The local Memphis office can be contacted at (901) 543-7259.

11. Where can I get more information about mold?

The following are several recommended resources for information about mold, its health affects, and cleanup.

- Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldresources.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>
- Tennessee Department of Health: <http://health.state.tn.us/environmental/mold.htm>
- <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/molds/>
- *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home*, from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), available at <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>
- *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*, from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), available at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html